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FM USEU BRUSSELS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEU/EU INTEREST COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 001075

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/ERA, EUR/RPM

E.O.: 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: A FIRST LOOK AT THE NEW FOREIGN
AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

REF: BRUSSELS 826

Sensitive but Unclassified - please handle accordingly.

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Although the European Parliament (EP) has less decision-making power in foreign policy as compared to other EU policy areas, the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) is traditionally a prestigious one and offers a platform for high-level visitors to reach out to the EU. But the new AFET Committee leadership, selected on July 16, has little high-level international experience, and, with one exception, no history of interest in transatlantic relations. The Committee has considerable depth, however, with members including a dozen former government heads or ministers in the foreign policy realm, and other high-profile figures, such as former EP President Poettering. This report provides an initial overview of the new leadership and membership of the AFET. The European Parliament reconvenes in September. END SUMMARY.

THE COMMITTEE'S ROLE

¶12. (SBU) While the Foreign Affairs Committee (abbreviated by the French acronym AFET) is responsible for foreign policy issues for the EP, the EP lacks formal decision-making power in many traditional foreign policy areas. Important aspects of the USG's foreign policy relationship with the EU are negotiated in other committees, including, for example, data privacy sharing agreements as well as all EU legislation on financial services, environment or industry-related fields. AFET nonetheless has some instruments to exercise control, including giving assent to accession negotiations of new member states, to cooperation agreements, and to association agreements concluded with third countries. AFET also has influence in determining the EP's budget for the external relations field.

¶13. (U) The Committee also offers a platform for third countries to present their views. For example, leaders who addressed the AFET in 2008 include Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Arab League Secretary General Amr Mousa, and Ukrainian PM Yulia Tymoshenko.

THIN RESUMES ON TOP, BUT CONSIDERABLE DEPTH

¶14. (SBU) Despite these recent high-profile visits and the Committee's prestigious reputation, the AFET leadership, elected July 16, does not have the foreign policy experience of previous committees. A few staffers from political groups following the committee privately expressed concerns about the qualifications of the new leadership and about the imbalance of its representation. Chairman Gabriele Albertini (Italian EPP), for example, is relatively unknown in the foreign policy sphere. Moreover, there is something international about, for example,

are expected to gain more power if the Lisbon Treaty enters into force in January 2010.

16. (SBU) While committee leaders hold agenda-setting responsibilities, other members, such as political group coordinators and rapporteurs (MEPs in charge of drafting reports on specific issues) are also influential and will likely remain in the hands of experienced MEPs, some with top-level experience in transatlantic relations. For example, Elmar Brok, the EPP coordinator, will almost surely also become the new chairman of the EP delegation for relations with the U.S. Overall, the Committee includes many qualified and experienced MEPs (per para 7).

WHO'S WHO IN THE NEW COMMITTEE

17. (SBU) The AFET committee leaders and political group coordinators (with the exception of the Socialist group coordinator, who has not yet been appointed) are:

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-- Gabriele Albertini, Chairman (EPP, Italy): A MEP since 2004 from the Italian center-right Forza party, Albertini was vice-president of the delegation for relations with the NATO parliamentary assembly and was a (not very active) member of the delegation for relations with the U.S. He was also mayor of Milan 1997-2006.

-- Fiorello Provella, First Vice-Chairman (EFD, Italy): Provella belongs to the small ultra-conservative and euroskeptic group EFD as a member of the Italian "Lega Nord" party. His election as a first vice-chairman elicited the only vocal opposition during the nomination proceedings. The socialists decided to abstain from the acclamation vote as a sign of protest.

-- Mircea Pascu, Second Vice-Chairman (Socialist S&D group, Romania): Former Romanian Defense Minister and previous AFET Vice-Chairman, Pascu is a respected and active MEP. A strong trans-atlanticist, he was cited in the Council of Europe report on "extraordinary renditions" and "CIA secret prisons" as a member of the Romanian Government who helped the U.S. on these issues, an accusation he strongly denies.

-- Dominique Baudis, Third Vice-Chairman (EPP, France): An international war correspondent for French television, Baudis started his political career as Mayor of Toulouse from 1983 to 2000 and as a member of the French National Assembly from 1988 to 1997. In 2000 he led the council that regulated French television and radio. A somewhat sensational figure, he hit the headlines in 2003 when he was cited in a murder and rape case involving the serial killer Partrice Alegre, and was later acquitted of all charges.

-- Jean-Luc Melenchon, Fourth Vice-Chairman (GUE-NGL, France): Melenchon quit the French Socialist party to create his own left-wing Parti de Gauche. He is a strong opponent to a European constitution and to the Lisbon Treaty.

-- Jose Ignacio Salafranca, EPP Coordinator (Spain): A professor of European law, Salafranca was elected to the EP in 1994 and has served as the Committee's EPP coordinator since 2001, as well as the EPP's spokesman in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Salafranca is a specialist in Latin America and the Middle East. He proved a good contact to the Mission during the last Parliamentary term.

-- Elmar Brok, EPP Coordinator (Germany): Brok has been in office since 1979 and was Chairman of AFET from 2000 to 2007. He was also (and will almost certainly remain) the EPP coordinator for institutional issues. Known for his flamboyant and direct style, Brok describes himself as an ally of the U.S., despite frequently criticizing the former Bush Administration on Iraq, Guantanamo, the ICC, the Kyoto Protocol, and the death penalty.

-- Annemie Neyts, ALDE Coordinator (Belgium): Neyts became the Flemish Liberal Party's chairman for the Brussels region in 1995,

then Belgium's Minister of Trade during the late-2001 Belgian EU Presidency. She presided over the EU Council during the Doha trade talks. She has served as the party's coordinator since 2004.

-- In addition to these key MEPs, the Committee's high-profile members include former Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis (EPP); Finland's former Prime Minister (PM) Anneli Jaatteenniemi, and Slovenia's former PM and Foreign Minister (FM) Alojz Peterle. Also members are four other former foreign ministers: Adrian Severin (Socialist S&D, Romania); Ioannis Kasoulides (EPP, Cyprus), Kristiina Ojuland (ALDE, Estonia) and Eduard Kukan (EPP, Slovakia); former defense ministers Jelko Kacin (EPP, Slovenia) and Kyriakos Mavronikolas (Socialist S&D, Cyprus); former Polish Minister for European Affairs and former AFET Chairman Jacek Saryusz-Wolski; former President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Poettering, and former leader of the ALDE group Graham Watson.

MURRAY